

# **MRC Pension Scheme**

## **Statement of Investment Principles**

September 2024

# Preface

## **Scheme background**

This Statement of Investment Principles (the 'SIP') details the principles governing investment decisions for both sections of the MRC Pension Scheme (the 'Scheme') – the MRC Section (the 'MRC Section') and the Universities' Section. While most of this SIP refers to both Sections, some elements may apply to just one of the two Sections; these are clearly stated.

The Scheme operates for the exclusive purpose of providing retirement and death benefits to eligible participants and beneficiaries, and provides benefits calculated on a defined benefit (DB) basis, other than for the AVC arrangements which are on a defined contribution (DC) / money-purchase basis. The MRC Section is open to new members. The Universities' Section is closed to new entrants but remains open to future accrual for existing active members, effective 1 January 2014.

## **Regulatory requirements and considerations**

Under the Pensions Act 1995 (the 'Act') and subsequent legislation, principally the Occupational Pension Schemes (Investment) Regulations 2005 (the 'Investment Regulations'), the Trustee must secure that a written statement of the principles governing investment decisions is prepared and maintained for the Scheme.

This SIP also reflects the Myners principles for institutional investment decision-making, which require trustee boards to act in a transparent and responsible manner.

The Trustee is responsible for all aspects of the operation of the Scheme including this SIP.

In agreeing its investment strategy, the Trustee has had regard to:

- The requirements of the Act concerning suitability and diversification of investments and the Trustee will consider those requirements on any review of this SIP or any change in the investment policy.
- The requirements of all applicable Investment Regulations.
- In respect of the additional voluntary contribution (AVC) arrangements provided on a money-purchase basis, the Trustee has taken into account the requirements and recommendations within the Pensions Regulator's General Code of Practice.

## **Responsibilities and appointments**

Only persons or organisations with the necessary skills, information and resources are actively involved in taking investment decisions affecting the Scheme. The Trustee draws on the expertise of external persons and organisations including the investment consultant, investment managers and the Scheme Actuary. Full details are set out in this SIP.

## **Consultation**

In accordance with the Act, the Trustee has obtained and considered written advice from Redington Limited (the investment consultant) prior to the preparation (or revision) of this SIP and have consulted UK Research and Innovation, the Sponsoring Employer. However, it should be noted that neither the Trustee (nor any investment manager to whom it has delegated any discretion to make decisions about investments) shall require the consent of the Sponsoring Employer to exercise any investment power.

## **Review**

The Trustee will review this SIP at least every three years and without delay after each significant change in investment policy, taking note of any changes in the Scheme's liabilities. Once agreed, and after consultation with the Sponsoring Employer, a copy of this SIP will be given to the Scheme Actuary and will be made available to Scheme members on request.

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# Statement of Investment Principles

## Investment governance structure

All investment decisions are taken by the Trustee Board as a whole. The Trustee believes that collective responsibility is the appropriate structure. However, the Trustee has appointed an Investment Committee (“IC”) with responsibilities as outlined in the IC’s Terms of Reference. The Trustee will undertake training where appropriate to ensure they have the necessary expertise to take the decisions required and to evaluate critically the advice received.

All investment decisions relating to the Scheme are under the control of the Trustee Board without constraint by the Sponsoring Employer. The Trustee will consult with the Sponsoring Employer when changing this SIP.

All day-to-day investment decisions are delegated to properly qualified and authorised investment managers of pension scheme portfolios. Investment management agreements have been exchanged with the investment managers and are reviewed from time-to-time to ensure that the manner in which they make investments on behalf of the Trustee Board is suitable for the Scheme.

## Investment strategy and objectives

The Scheme’s investment strategy has been agreed by the Trustee having taken advice from the investment consultant in relation to the suitability of investments and the need to diversify and takes due account of the Scheme’s liability profile along with its funding level.

The Trustee’s primary objectives are:

- To provide appropriate security for all beneficiaries.
- To achieve an appropriate balance between risk and return with regards to the cost of the Scheme and the security of the benefits.

In setting the investment strategy, the Trustee aims to:

- Generate a sufficient return to maintain a strong funding level.
- Limit the impact of adverse market events on the funding level and employer affordability.
- Manage the risks associated with the assets and liabilities.
- Provide suitable liquidity of assets such that the Trustee can meet benefit payments without being forced to sell investments at inopportune times.

The Trustee has translated its objectives into a suitable strategic asset allocation benchmark for the Scheme. This is included in the Trustee's Summary of Investment Arrangements document.

In accordance with the Financial Services & Markets Act 2000, the Trustee is responsible for setting the general investment policy, but the responsibility for all day-to-day investment management decisions has been delegated to investment managers authorised under the Act.

The Trustee is responsible for reviewing both the Scheme's asset allocation and investment strategy as part of each actuarial valuation in consultation with the Scheme's investment consultant. The Trustee may also reconsider the asset allocation and the investment strategy outside the triennial valuation period where necessary.

The Trustee considers the Scheme's current strategic asset allocation to be consistent with the current financial position of the Scheme. This assessment takes into account the Technical Provisions set out in the Scheme's Statement of Funding Principles. "Technical Provisions" is the value of the Scheme's liabilities for funding purposes as at the latest available Scheme-specific actuarial valuation date, being 31 December 2022.

### **The Trustee's policy in relation to the kinds of investments to be held**

The Trustee has full regard to its investment powers as set out in the Trust Deed and Rules.

The Scheme may invest in quoted and unquoted securities of UK and overseas markets including:

- Equities.
- Fixed interest and index-linked bonds.
- Cash.
- Property.
- Infrastructure.
- Private equity.
- Hedge funds and pooled investment vehicles considered appropriate for tax-exempt registered occupational pension schemes.

The Trustee has considered the attributes of the various asset classes (including derivative instruments), these attributes being:

- Security (or quality) of the investment.
- Yield (expected long-term return).
- Spread (or volatility) of returns.

- Term (or duration) of the investment.
- Exchange rate risk.
- Marketability/liquidity (i.e. the tradability on regulated markets).
- Taxation.

The Trustee considers all of the stated classes of investment to be suitable to the circumstances of the Scheme. Given the size and nature of the Scheme, the Trustee has decided to invest through a combination of segregated mandates and pooled funds; any such investment is effected through a direct agreement with an investment manager.

### **The Trustee's policy in relation to the balance between different kinds of investments**

The appointed investment managers will hold a diversified mix of investments in line with their agreed benchmark and within their discretion to diverge from the benchmark. Within each major asset class each manager will maintain a diversified portfolio of investments. The relative importance placed on diversification will vary based on the nature of the investment (for example, whether it is held for liability matching or return-seeking purposes).

### **The Trustee's policy in relation to the expected return on investments**

The Trustee anticipates the expected return of the investment strategy to at least meet the overall required rate of return assumed in the Scheme Actuary's published actuarial valuation report in order to maintain a fully funded status under the agreed assumptions.

### **The Trustee's policy in relation to the realisation of investments**

In the event of an unexpected need to realise all or part of the assets of the portfolio, the Trustee requires the investment managers to be able to realise the Scheme's investments in a reasonable timescale by reference to the market conditions existing at the time the disposal is required and subject to the best interests of the Scheme. The majority of the assets are not expected to take an undue period of time to liquidate.

### **The Trustee's policy in relation to financially material considerations**

The Trustee expects its investment managers, where appropriate, to take account of financially material considerations, including environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors as part of their investment analysis and decision-making process.

The Trustee reviews the investment managers' policy in respect of financially material considerations on an annual basis to satisfy itself that it is consistent with the above approach.

### **The Trustee's policy in relation to the extent to which non-financial matters are taken into account**

The Trustee's approach is that the financial interests of the Scheme members are its first priority when choosing investments. The Trustee will take members' preferences into account if it considers it appropriate to do so.

Non-financial matters may be taken into account if the Trustee has good reason to think that the members would share the concern and that the decision does not involve a risk of significant detriment to members' financial interests.

If the Trustee appoints investment managers to manage a segregated portfolio of equities or bonds, the managers have been given specific instructions not to invest in the shares of those companies whose predominant business revenues come from tobacco related products. Subject to that specific exclusion, the Trustee has delegated to the investment managers the selection of individual assets and the exercise of responsible ownership of the assets selected.

The Trustee reviews the investment managers' policy in respect of non-financially material considerations on an annual basis to satisfy itself that it is consistent with the above approach.

### **Risk capacity and risk appetite**

The Trustee, after seeking appropriate investment advice, has selected a strategic asset allocation benchmark for the Scheme including control ranges for each asset class and or geographic region.

Subject to their respective benchmarks and guidelines, the investment managers are given full discretion over the choice of securities and are expected to maintain a diversified portfolio.

The Trustee is satisfied that the investments selected are consistent with its investment objectives, particularly in relation to diversification, risk, expected return and liquidity.

### **The Trustee's policy in relation to risks**

The Trustee considers the main risk to be that of the assets being insufficient to meet the Scheme's liabilities as they fall due. The Trustee has assessed the likelihood of undesirable financial outcomes arising in the future.

Investment policies are set with the aim of having sufficient and appropriate assets to cover the Scheme's Technical Provisions, and with the need to avoid undue contribution rate volatility.

In determining its investment strategy, the Trustee received advice from the investment consultant as to the likely range of funding levels for strategies with



differing levels of investment risk relative to the Scheme's liability profile. Taking this into account, along with the expected returns underlying the most recent actuarial valuation, the strategy is then adopted.

Although the Trustee acknowledges that the main risk is that the Scheme will have insufficient assets to meet its liabilities, the Trustee recognises other contributory risks, including the following. Namely the risk:

- Associated with the differences in the sensitivity of asset and liability values to changes in financial and demographic factors.
- Of the Scheme having insufficient liquid assets to meet its immediate liabilities.
- Of the investment managers failing to achieve the required rate of return.
- Of a lack of diversification of investments.
- Of the failure of the Scheme's Sponsoring Employer to meet its obligations.

The Trustee manages and measures these risks on a regular basis via actuarial and investment reviews, and in the setting of investment objectives and strategy.

The Trustee undertakes monitoring of the investment managers' performance against their targets and objectives on a regular basis.

Each fund or mandate in which the Trustee invests has a stated performance objective against which investment performance will be measured. Within each asset class, the investment managers are expected to maintain a portfolio of assets (or funds), which ensures that the risk being accepted in each type of market is broadly diversified.

The divergence of the actual distribution of the investments from the benchmark weighting will be monitored by the Scheme's investment managers. Any deviation from the target asset allocation will be discussed periodically with the investment consultant.

## **Stewardship in relation to the Scheme's assets**

The Trustee has a fiduciary duty to consider its approach to the stewardship of the investments and to generate returns at an appropriate level of risk for the benefit of members and beneficiaries over the long term. The Trustee can promote an investment's long term success through monitoring, engagement and/or voting, either directly or through its investment managers.

Full details of the Trustee's approach to stewardship can be found in its Stewardship Policy.

### **The Trustee's policy in relation to engagement and monitoring (including peer to peer engagement)**

The Trustee's policy is to delegate responsibility for engaging and monitoring investee companies to the investment managers and expects the investment managers to use their discretion to generate returns at an appropriate level of risk for the Scheme.

The Trustee does not envisage being directly involved with peer to peer engagement in investee companies. The Scheme's fund managers are expected to act as financial intermediaries with investee companies.

### **The Trustee's policy in relation to voting rights**

The Trustee's policy is to delegate responsibility for the exercising of rights (including voting rights) attaching to investments to the investment managers and to encourage the managers to exercise those rights. The investment managers are expected to provide regular reports for the Trustee detailing their voting activity.

### **Investment management monitoring**

The Trustee will assess the performance, processes and cost effectiveness of the investment managers by means of regular, but not less than annual, reviews of the results and other information, in consultation with the investment consultant.

The overall performance of the investment managers is monitored by the Trustee with the assistance of the investment consultant.

The investment managers will provide the Trustee with quarterly statements of the assets held along with a quarterly performance report. The investment managers will also report verbally or provide additional presentations to the Trustee on request.

The investment managers will inform the Trustee of any changes in the internal performance objective and guidelines of any pooled funds or segregated mandates used by the Scheme as and when they occur.

The Trustee will assess the quality of the performance and processes of the investment managers by means of a review. The frequency of these reviews will depend on the Trustee's investment beliefs and overall objectives for investing in the specific funds or mandates at the outset.

The Trustee receives an independent investment performance monitoring report from the investment consultant on a quarterly basis.

Appropriate written advice will be taken from the investment consultant before the review, appointment or removal of the investment managers.

## **The Trustee's policy in relation to its investment managers**

In detailing below the policies on the investment manager arrangements, the overriding approach of the Trustee is to select investment managers that meet the primary objectives of the Trustee. As part of the selection process and the ongoing review of the investment managers, the Trustee considers how well each investment manager meets the Trustee's policies and provides value for money over a suitable timeframe.

- **How the arrangement incentivises the investment manager to align its investment strategy and decisions with the Trustee's policies**

The Trustee has delegated the day to day management of the Scheme's assets to investment managers. Both the MRC and Universities Sections' assets are invested in a mixture of pooled funds and segregated mandates. Both pooled funds and segregated mandates have their own policies and objectives and charge a fee, agreed with the investment manager, for their services. Such fees incentivise the investment managers to adhere to their stated policies and objectives.

- **How the arrangement incentivises the investment manager to engage and take into account financial and non-financial matters over the medium to long-term**

The Trustee, in conjunction with its investment consultant, appoints its investment managers to meet specific Scheme policies. It expects that its investment managers make decisions based on assessments about the financial and non-financial performance of underlying investments, and that they engage with issuers of debt or equity to improve their performance (and thereby the Scheme's performance) over an appropriate time horizon.

The Trustee also expects its investment managers to take appropriate non-financial matters into account as long as the decision does not involve a risk of significant detriment to members' financial interests.

If the Trustee appoints investment managers to manage a segregated portfolio of equities or bonds, the managers have been given specific instructions not to invest in the securities of those companies whose predominant business revenues come from tobacco related products. Subject to that specific exclusion, the Trustee has delegated to the investment managers the selection of individual assets and the exercise of responsible ownership of the assets selected.

- **How the method (and time horizon) of the evaluation of the investment manager's performance and the remuneration for asset management services are in line with the Trustees' investment policies**

The Trustee expects its investment managers to invest the assets within their portfolio in a manner that is consistent with the guidelines and constraints set out in its appointment documentation. The Trustee reviews the investment managers periodically. These reviews incorporate benchmarking of performance and fees. The time horizon for the Trustee when reviewing performance will depend on the Trustee's investment beliefs and overall objectives for investing in the specific funds or mandates when the initial investment decision was made.

If the Trustee determines that the investment manager is no longer managing the assets in line with the Trustee policies, it will make its concerns known to the investment manager and may ultimately disinvest.

The Trustee pays its investment managers a management fee which is a fixed percentage of assets under management. Some investment managers also receive a performance incentive fee.

Prior to agreeing a fee structure, the Trustee, in conjunction with its investment consultant, considers the appropriateness of this structure, both in terms of the fee level compared to that of other similar products and in terms of the degree to which it will incentivise the investment manager.

- **How the Trustee monitors portfolio turnover costs incurred by the investment manager, and how they define and monitor targeted portfolio turnover or turnover range**

The Trustee, in conjunction with its investment consultant, has processes in place to review investment turnover costs incurred by the Scheme on an annual basis. The Trustee receives a report which includes the turnover costs incurred by the investment managers used by the Scheme.

The Trustee expects turnover costs of the investment managers to be in line with their peers, taking into account the style adopted by the investment manager, the asset class invested in and prevailing market conditions.

The Trustee does not explicitly monitor turnover, set target turnover or turnover ranges. The Trustee believes that the investment managers should follow their stated approach with a focus on risk and net return, rather than on turnover. In addition, the individual mandates are unique and bespoke in nature and there is the potential for markets to change significantly over a short period of time.

- **The timeframe of arrangements with investment managers**

The Trustee does not in general enter into fixed long-term agreements with its investment managers and instead retains the ability to change investment manager should the performance and processes of the investment manager deviate from the Trustee's policies. The Trustee may also change its investment

manager if the original purpose of investing in a specific fund or mandate is no longer appropriate to meet the Trustee's overall strategic objectives.

However, the Trustee expects its manager appointments to have a relatively long timeframe, subject to the manager adhering to its stated policies, and the continued positive assessment of its ability to meet its performance objective.

## **Employer-related investments**

The Trustee will not make direct investments in the Sponsoring Employer's own securities or properties. The amount of the Sponsoring Employer's securities or properties, owned by pooled investment vehicles or segregated mandates invested in, are monitored if applicable to the investment universe of the vehicle or mandate in question.

## **Additional voluntary contributions (AVCs)**

The Trustee has full discretion as to the appropriate investment vehicles made available to members of the Scheme for their voluntary contributions. Only investment vehicles normally considered suitable for voluntary contributions will be considered by the Trustee, having taken appropriate written advice from its investment advisers.

The Trustee makes available the following range of investment options for members' AVCs:

<b>AVC provider</b>	<b>Investment options</b>
Utmost Life and Pensions	Unit trusts
Standard Life	With profits, unit trusts

In selecting this range of funds offered:

- The Trustee has taken advice from its professional advisers on:
  - the risks faced by members in investing on a money purchase basis.
  - The Trustee's responsibilities in the selection and monitoring of the investment options offered.
- The Trustee will continue to manage the AVC arrangements having taken professional advice on these matters.
- The Trustee will monitor the performance of AVC providers periodically.
- Members are directed to seek independent financial advice when considering their AVC arrangements.

## Appointments and responsibilities

This section sets out the key appointments and responsibilities with respect to the investment aspects of the Scheme.

### **Trustee**

The Trustee's primary responsibilities include:

- The preparation of this SIP, reviewing its contents and modifying it if deemed appropriate, in consultation with the Sponsoring Employer and the investment consultant, at least every three years. The SIP will also be reviewed following a significant change to investment strategy and/or the investment manager(s).
- Monitoring the overall performance, risk, return and liquidity of the Scheme on a regular basis.
- Appointing investment consultants, the custodian and investment managers as necessary for the good stewardship of the Scheme's assets.
- Reviewing the investment strategy as part of each triennial actuarial valuation, and/or asset liability modelling exercise, and/or significant changes to the Scheme's liabilities, taking advice from the investment consultant.
- Assessing the processes and the performance of the investment manager(s) by means of regular, but not less than annual, reviews of information obtained (including investment performance).
- Monitoring compliance of the investment arrangements with this SIP and with the relevant sections of the Act, the Investment Regulations and any regulatory guidance on a regular basis.
- Monitoring the way in which the investment manager(s) have cast votes on behalf of the Trustee in respect of the Scheme's equity holdings.
- Overseeing responsibilities with respect to ESG-related considerations and actions. A summary of climate-related roles and responsibilities are detailed in the Trustee's latest TCFD Statement.

### **Investment consultant**

The main responsibilities of the investment consultant include:

- Assisting the Trustee in the preparation and periodic review of this SIP in consultation with the Sponsoring Employer.
- Undertaking project work including the development and review of investment strategy, investment performance and manager structure as required by the Trustee.
- Advising the Trustee on the selection and review of investment managers.

- Producing for the Trustee regular reporting on the overall performance, risk, return and liquidity of the Scheme to facilitate monitoring.
- Providing training or education on any investment related matter as and when the Trustee sees fit.
- Monitoring and advising upon where contributions should be invested or disinvested on a periodic basis.

### **Investment managers**

The investment managers' main responsibilities include:

- Investing the assets within their portfolio in a manner that is consistent with the guidelines and constraints set out in their appointment documentation.
- Ensuring that the investment of the assets within their portfolio is compliant with prevailing legislation.
- Providing the Trustee with quarterly reports and a review of the investment performance of their portfolio.
- Meetings with the Trustee as and when required.
- Informing the Trustee of any changes in the fee structure, internal performance objectives and guidelines of any pooled fund within their portfolio as and when they occur.
- Considering financially material risks affecting investments within their portfolio.
- Exercising voting rights on shareholdings within their portfolio in accordance with their general policy and in line with the Trustee's stated expectations (as per the Trustee's Stewardship Policy).

### **Custodian**

The custodian's main responsibilities include:

- The safe-keeping of the Scheme's assets in respect of which they are responsible.
- Processing the settlement of transactions.
- Providing the Trustee with statements of the assets and associated cashflows.

### **Scheme Actuary**

The Scheme Actuary's main responsibilities in respect of investment policy include:

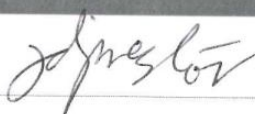
- Commenting on the suitability of the Scheme's investment strategy given the financial characteristics of the Scheme.
- Performing the triennial (or more frequently as required) actuarial valuation and advising on the Scheme's funding level and therefore the appropriate level of contributions in order to aid the Trustee in balancing short-term and long-term investment objectives.


## Compliance

The Scheme's SIP is available to members on request.

A copy of the Scheme's current SIP is also supplied to the Sponsoring Employer, the Scheme's auditors and the Scheme Actuary.

This SIP supersedes all others and was approved by the Trustee.

Full name	
Signature	
Position	CHAIR OF TRUSTEE BOARD.
For and on behalf of	MRC PENSION TRUST LIMITED.
Date	17 <sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2024

Full name	
Signature	
Position	Trustee
For and on behalf of	MRC Pension Trust Limited
Date	17 <sup>th</sup> September 2024.